



Department of
Education and Training



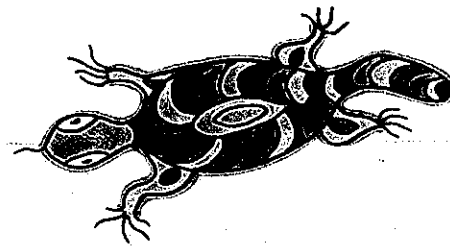
Deadly Yarns


Anecdotes about Language, Culture, Identity and Power
from the Deadly Ways to Learn project



Deadly
ways to
learn

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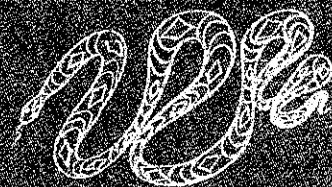
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Introduction.....



Background

The yarns in this book show that the things you "know" are limited by what you can "see", and that what you can see is limited by where you are looking from. When you are shown how to look at the world through a different window, you realise that some of the things you have always "known" are things you have actually assumed.

This book is about exposing assumptions and alerting readers to another worldview: particularly to aspects of Aboriginal worldview.

When you understand where someone is "coming from" you have more chance of connecting with that person and having productive dialogue. Such dialogue is essential to understanding the needs and aspirations of groups and individuals with respect to education.

So, why a bunch of yarns?

First, yarns capture a range of complex issues in a few short sentences. Also, they are *peopled*, and we are all fascinated by the things other people do and say. Second, a collection of yarns written by a number of different people enables different "voices" to be heard. This is especially important in a book about linguistic and cultural diversity, because it *shows* the diversity.

Third, this format offers light relief for teachers (and others) who have to read a lot of complex material. You will be able to pick up this book and read a few

yarns over breakfast, and you'll be willing to pick it up again the next morning because it's not hard work. That is not to imply, however, that the messages in it are lightweight. There is a lot of food for thought in these yarns.

Finally, yarns challenge the received wisdom that important issues have to be addressed a particular way. This reflects the two-way principle that the Wadjella (white fella) way is not the only way, and that we should try some alternatives from time to time. Yarns are one of those alternatives.

About these yarns ...

All the yarns in this book relate to real events and have been written by real people, all of whom are named. Most of the contributors were participants in the *Deadly Ways to Learn* project. By giving permission for their yarns to appear in this book, they have revealed a little bit of themselves so others may benefit from the insights they have gained. This is much appreciated. Names *within* the yarns have been changed (unless permission was given to do otherwise).

In a lot of these yarns, the actual incidents are less significant than the thinking that they triggered and the subconscious "blinkers" that they lifted. They exemplify the kind of introspection and reflection that people have to engage in if they are to develop a greater awareness of differences and



similarities in language and culture across groups. They also illustrate the fact that it is through contact between peoples that we learn from (and about) each other, and also about ourselves.

Through the process of review, it became apparent that different yarns “press buttons” for different people: where one reviewer found a given yarn very powerful, another reviewer found it mildly interesting, and vice versa. This is because of differing backgrounds that readers bring with them. While different readings were apparent within cultural groups, they were significantly amplified across them: in some cases, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal reviewers took markedly different meanings from the same yarn. In review, these differences became a catalyst to further discussion and enabled the people in question to learn more about each other, themselves and their respective worldviews.

The yarns have been loosely organised into clusters of similar ideas, but these divisions are arbitrary. Language, culture, power and identity are inextricably linked, and teachers who proceed without taking account of these factors in curriculum and pedagogy do so at their peril – and that of their students. Not only do the “different” students suffer in a culturally and linguistically blinkered curriculum, but so too do students who make up the “mainstream” because they are denied the opportunity to taste the cultural and linguistic diversity that is one of Australia’s great assets.

What should I do with these yarns?

Read them, think about them and talk about them with colleagues, friends and family. Also, see if someone who is culturally or linguistically different from you is willing to talk about them.

Think especially about what these yarns mean in terms of the curriculum and classroom activities you offer your students.

You might also show some of these yarns to your students, to get them thinking and talking about cultural and linguistic diversity.

Editor’s Notes

Throughout this book, editorial modifications and commentary have been kept to a minimum so the yarns, and the voices telling, them can “speak for themselves”.

The three sectors involved in the *Deadly Ways to Learn* project have different titles for the Aboriginal support personnel that work alongside teachers in schools. For this reason, Aboriginal support personnel have been variously referred to as *Aboriginal Teacher Assistants (ATAs)* or as *Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEOs)*. This difference reflects the difference of sectors from which the yarns have been drawn and does not reflect a difference in the roles or expertise of the people involved.



